



MEMORANDUM

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

October 11, 2012

TO: Health Chapter Advisory Committee

FROM: Ned Noel, Associate Planner

SUBJECT: Update & Identified Issues



The Health Chapter project for the City of Eau Claire's Comprehensive Plan officially kicked off on September 18th at RCU's corporate headquarters with over 40 people attending. There was a strong showing from the invited advisory committee. Staff went over the purpose of the project and discussed the role of the advisory committee. Lance Bernard, with SRF Consulting Group, gave an educational presentation on the linkages between human health and the built environment. The meeting wrapped up with staff giving the committee and attendees a **homework assignment** to assess their neighborhood and workplace for health in the built environment. Staff received 20 homework assignments. The feedback contained in these assessments is attached but also summarized here.

Physical Activity/Active Living

- 30% said they are not able to conveniently (within 5 minutes) access bike trails from their home.
- 85% said they are able to conveniently access parks/school yard from their home.
- 35% said they are not able to walk or bike to work or do errands.
- 40% said city parks in their neighborhood are not adequately developed to encourage usage or they did not know for sure.
- 67% said they did not know where their child's Safe Route to School was located.

Food/Nutrition

- 86% said they have convenient access to farmer markets and or community gardens.
- 89% said they have the ability to create a garden at home.
- 36% said their child's school is located where fast food restaurants and gas-station convenient stores abound.

Housing/Land Use/Transportation

- 41% said their neighborhood does not contain a variety of housing options for differing life-stages and socio-economic backgrounds.
- 30% said there is a problem with blighted housing and neglected public infrastructure in their neighborhood.
- 60% said there is no close-by mix of uses where they live (where one can walk to work or do errands).

- 20% said transportation access to medical facilities was a problem or they did not know.
- 43% said streets in their neighborhood are not able to accommodate a variety of users (vehicles, pedestrians, bicycles).
- 25% said City bus routes are not within convenient access from their home/workplace.

Crime/Safety

- 33% said there are places they know that lend themselves to potential loitering, panhandling and crime.
- 90% said the housing in their neighborhood has windows facing the street to encourage more “eyes-on-the-street”, thereby deterring potential crime.
- 47% said speeding is a common problem on their block.
- 74% said there are intersections they know of that are very dangerous and lack safety measures such as pedestrian crossing signs, crosswalks, audible crossing signals, etc.
- 65% said public infrastructure (sidewalks, streets, trails, etc.) are not designed in their neighborhood where people with disabilities can use them (i.e. audible sounds, textured surfaces, ramps, etc.)

Drug Use

- 10% said they find second-hand smoking in the parks they frequent a reoccurring problem.
- 44% did not know if second-hand smoking is a problem in the apartment or rental building they live in. 50% said it was not a problem.
- 10% said that the concentration or amount of alcohol selling-establishments in their neighborhood is causing health problems/crime.

Environmental

- 100% said that their neighborhood has views of greenery/nature for mental health benefits.
- 20% said there are areas prone to flooding in their neighborhood.
- 30% said there are problem areas in the city that have higher levels of ambient heat (i.e. areas with a concentration of buildings and pavement tend to be warmer). 25% did not know.
- 15% said air pollution from traffic, the airport, or industry, etc. is a problem where they live/work.
- 25% said exposure to other pollutants such as water, light, noise, lead, landfill, etc.) is a concern.
- 10% said basic sanitation such as trash storage is a problem in their neighborhood.
- 41% said their workplace has occupational hazards such as unclean air, mold, concern of fire, lack of daylight, etc.

Additional Comments/Observations

- Many concerns related to personal safety (speeding, poor visibility at intersections, crossing streets are dangerous, children getting to their bus stops can be dangerous, biking and pedestrian safety, poor lighting in parks, along trails and in some parking lots).
- Some people said there are lots of areas with no sidewalks or trails in the city.
- Allowing smoking in parks made this person not use them.
- A comment was made to limit the amount of fast food restaurants or their locations.
- A comment was made that people rely on gas station food mainly in this neighborhood.
- Comment that areas of pavement downtown get really hot during warm weather.

- Comment that in this neighborhood landlords repeatedly violate health codes and are rarely fined.
- Comment on involving the school district more. To make an effort to improve the quality of food offered, as well as locally grown and student grown food. Partner with the district and parents to have more children bike or walk to school.
- Comment on providing more opportunities for allowing local foods such as community gardens, chickens, outdoor food processing, and fewer regulations/more transparency. Also, to help build/allow farm-to-school programs.
- Comment on pedestrian safety along State Street, as hundreds of people cross the street every day and automobile traffic is often heavy. The speed limit is not enforced, especially on the hill. Drivers rarely give way to pedestrians on crosswalks.

Related feedback applicable to this project was also supplied by the City/County Health Department from their recent **Eau Claire Community Health Needs Survey**. The top areas that came back with the most concern include: physical activity, healthy nutrition, mental health and alcohol and drug use (in no particular order). Survey comments and areas of concern relating to the built environment were:

- Lack of neighborhood grocery stores with fresh/whole food
- Want more safe ride transportation (related to alcohol)
- Rivers and lakes used for fishing, swimming and play are not always safe
- Many workers are not satisfied with the building conditions they work in
- Too many trails across roadways – EC motorists are not biker friendly
- Would like to see more downtown activities and businesses that can be walked to
- More trails/paths
- Trail/path maps
- Ability to use a school or nearby building for exercise
- More public exercise equipment

Lastly, planning and health department staff has listed **other potential/existing issues** that could be evaluated for possibly policy implementation.

- Consider requiring Health Impact Assessments (HIAs) before approving certain policies or development/public infrastructure projects. Examples of this could be to provide guidance on potentially contaminating land uses with residential areas/natural resources, or to look at how a new multi-lane highway could affect human health ranging from air and noise pollution to pedestrian crossing safety.
- Research the *County Health Rankings* results for why Eau Claire had the highest density of fast food restaurants of all counties in the State.
- Research the number of and access to healthy/local foods (e.g. farmer's market, community gardens, school gardens, grocery stores selling fruits and vegetables and locally produced foods).
- Consider urban husbandry solutions to increase local food production and access.

- Research alcohol usage and the number/density of alcohol selling establishments in the City and how that affects human health.
- Consider “Crime Prevention through Community Design” policies. (e.g. evaluate grade sightlines for pedestrian underpasses, locating entrances/shelters that are in public view, etc.)
- Increase developer education/incentives to build more mixed-use and compact development projects.
- Broaden brownfield cleanup strategies of polluted land for redevelopment or underutilized sites. Take advantage of Federal and State assistance more.
- Map locations of possible contaminated sites within the city and how they might affect human health.
- Address possible “urban heat zones” in the city which can possibly lead to ill health effects (places where buildings and infrastructure such as pavement increase the ambient air temperature).
- Consider Climate Change adaptation strategies such as dealing with extreme weather events/periods.
- Consider affordable housing strategies such as including a portion of low-income housing in new developments or mixed use projects.
- Further expand policies on life-cycle housing within neighborhoods and workforce housing near places of employment (e.g. provide a variety of housing types and homes styles that lend well to people’s different life-stages. Provide affordable housing near service businesses to reduce their commute costs).
- Research the community’s physical activity resources to assess any problems such as lack of access or infrastructure which would encourage more active living.
- Consider strategies to reduce Vehicles Mile Traveled (VMT) such as encouraging ride share, commuter choice programs, flex hours, better transit access, workforce housing and smart growth.
- Consider reviewing building codes/enforcement on common occupational health concerns (i.e. poor indoor air quality for buildings and schools).

The compilation of these issues will be discussed at the “Issues Development” meeting on October 18th at RCU from 7 pm to 9 pm. At their October 15th meeting, the City’s Plan Commission will provide feedback on these issues before staff brings them to this public meeting for further evaluation.

Thereafter, the remaining two meetings will focus on crafting policy action items around the selected issues to be addressed and a review of the Health Chapter draft. As noted previously, meetings will continue throughout the rest of the fall and winter, with the project being completed in spring 2013.